

ON THE LIBRARY OF A MEDICAL SCHOOL.¹

By WILLIAM OSLER, M. D.

One day last spring a London bookseller called and said ^[109] he had a library of seventeenth and eighteenth century medical books for sale, which had been gathered by the physicians connected with the Warrington Dispensary. Looking over the catalogue I saw at once that it was a collection of value, and knowing that it would supplement very nicely the special libraries which have gradually grown up in connection with the Johns Hopkins Medical School, I wrote to Mr. W. A. Marburg and he authorized me to purchase it and to have it put in good order, and this has been done, and to complete his generous gift, Mr. Marburg has furnished bookcases as well. Dr. Welch will speak of some of the special works. I may mention in passing that the library is very rich in English medical pamphlets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and contains a large number of the works of classical medical authors which we had not in the library.

A word or two on Warrington and the men who collected these books: This old town on the banks of the Mersey, partly in Chester, partly in Lancashire, had in the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century a notable group of scientific and professional men. The Aiken family made the place celebrated as a literary center, as it was largely through the Rev. John Aiken that the Warrington Academy became so famous. His son John became well known through his "Biographical Memoirs of Medicine in Great Britain," and the large work on "General Biography." A sister of

¹ Remarks made on the occasion of the presentation of the Marburg collection of books to the Johns Hopkins Medical School, January 2, 1907.

[109] the elder Aiken was the distinguished authoress, Mrs. Barbauld, and Lucy Aiken, a daughter of Dr. John, became a well-known figure in English literature. But by far the most important of the scientific men who lived here in the eighteenth century was Joseph Priestley, who was tutored in "classics and polite literature" at the academy for six years, from 1761. He must have had a very stimulating effect on his colleagues. A very notable character who also has a strong interest for us on this side of the water is Thomas Percival, who was born at Warrington and practiced there before going to Manchester. Upon his work, "Medical Ethics, 1803," was founded the code of ethics of the American Medical Association. I see it stated that a brother of this Percival was also a well-known physician at Warrington, and at his death left a very large library; some of the books may possibly be those before us this evening. James Kendrick was a physician and naturalist of the same type. It was by the exertions of these men and their colleagues that this library was formed. The influence of the Warrington Academy, the educational college of the Unitarians of England, made the town a literary and scientific center, and the medical profession must have benefited largely from the intellectual environment of the place. So prominent indeed did it become that a Press was organized, and in looking over Miss Nutting's interesting collection of books on "Nursing," to which I shall refer later, I noticed that from it the works of the celebrated philanthropist, John Howard, were issued. Altogether, the collection has an affiliation with a remarkable group of men, and its value is not a little enhanced to know that it has been used by such men as Priestley, and John Aiken, and Thomas Percival.

The occasion offers an opportunity to make a few remarks upon the future of the libraries connected with this school.

Books are the tools of the mind, and in a community of progressive scholars the literature of the world in the different departments of knowledge must be represented. With the existing arrangements we have gradually built up two libraries, one connected with the hospital and the other with the university. In the former are to be found the modern

works and journals relating to medicine, surgery, obstetrics, [110] and the various specialties. Under Dr. Hurd's fostering care this side of the library has grown rapidly, and we have had several valuable donations from the libraries of the late Dr. Donaldson and the late Dr. Chatard. Files of all the more important medical journals are there to be found, and we can all testify to the very stimulating influence which this library had had upon the hospital staff and upon the senior medical students.

After the medical school had opened and the laboratories of anatomy, physiology and pharmacology been erected, the University began the collection which is in this building and which represents the modern works and journals in those scientific subjects upon which medicine is based. There are now very complete files of the scientific journals of anatomy, embryology, physiology, pharmacology, and physiological chemistry. While, in some ways, the ideal plan is to have a special library of each subject in each laboratory, the buildings here are so close together that it was thought best to concentrate all of the collections in this building.

Now it is along these two lines that a library of a medical school should progress, but there are one or two other sides of the question which may be considered. In a large city with another active medical library supported by the profession, the two should work in harmony, as great economies could be effected, particularly in the purchase of the more expensive works and journals. I am glad to know that the library of the Medical and Chirurgical Society is prepared to co-operate with the other medical libraries in this city in some such plan. It is not worth while for the library of the medical school to deal extensively with local literature or with the transactions of the State societies, or to attempt to keep files of all the smaller American journals. There are two other directions in which the library of a medical school should grow, and they are well represented by the collections presented to-night. When a man devotes his life to some particular branch of study and accumulates, year by year, a more or less complete literature, it is very sad after his death to have such a library come under the ham-

[110] mer—almost the inevitable fate. Fortunately, such libraries are very often offered for sale *en bloc*, and this was the case with the large collection of works on teratology and embryology formed by the late Professor Ahlfeld, of Germany. Through the liberality of Mr. W. F. Jencks this very valuable library has been secured for us and will be presented to-night by Dr. Williams. These special groups of books are of the greatest value to the student. It is interesting to know that in connection with the training school of the hospital Miss Nutting has gradually formed a library of all the works relating to nursing and to the care of the sick in peace and war, and I may remind you that we are already the fortunate possessors of another remarkable collection, that of the late Dr. Fisher, who gathered together the set of portraits which was presented to the hospital a few years ago by Dr. Kelly.

This Warrington collection represents a fourth side of the library work. I think you will all agree with me that the interest which has been taken here in the history of medicine and in the biography of the great men of our profession has had a very stimulating influence on the younger men, in giving to them that historical outlook so important in scientific research. The library of a great medical school should contain the original works of all the great masters of medicine. No book should be added to a library simply on account of its age. As in modern literature so in that of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, there is an enormous quantity of trash which is hardly worth shelf room. I would have *all* of the original works of *all* of the great men; and one special value of this Marburg gift is that it is so rich in original editions of many of our masters. For example, I would have in such a library a carefully selected group of the works of Hippocrates, not everything, of course, but the standard editions, such as the Aldine folio, and the editions Frobenius and the more important translations; the editio princeps of Celsus, 1479; the more important of the works of Galen, including the fine Aldine edition, 1525; good editions of Dioscorides, Aretaeus, and of Pliny, and of the other great medical writers of the Greco-Roman school. On the same

principle should be collected the chief works of the Arabian^[110] physicians, and a shelf or two should be devoted to the school of Salerno. The great medical Humanists should be well represented—Linacre, Caius, and others. Every scrap of the writing of such a man as Vesalius should be collected. A good beginning has been made with the 1543 edition of the “*Fabrica*,” but of such a man all the editions of all his works should be here. The same may be said of such great anatomists as Fabricius, Malpighi, Eustachius, Sylvius, and many others of the sixteenth century. The original works of the great physiologists should be sought for. Every scrap of the writings of Harvey (and they are not numerous) and every edition should be here. In practical illustration of my remarks I beg to present to the Marburg collection an original edition of the “*De Motu Cordis*,” 1628, perhaps the^[111] greatest single contribution to medicine ever made, and which did as much for physiology as the “*Fabrica*” of Vesalius did for anatomy. The “*De Motu Cordis*” has become an excessively rare book. I had been on the outlook for a copy for nearly ten years. It had not appeared in an auction catalogue since 1895. Then in August of last year a very much cut, stained and unbound copy was offered to me at a very high figure. It had come from the library of Dr. Pettigrew, the author of a work on “*Medical Biography*.” I had been waiting a long time for a copy, but this looked so shabby and dirty that I decided not to take it. Some months later the booksellers sent the copy back nicely cleansed and beautifully bound, and this time I succumbed. Within forty-eight hours the same dealers sent me another copy from the library of the late Professor Milne Edwards, of Paris, uncut and very nicely bound, which they offered at the same price. Naturally, I took the larger copy and the other one went to a friend in this country. The copy I here present to the library has been a little too energetically cleansed, so that the leaves are very tender and in places have had to be repaired. It came from the library of a physician in London and the bibliographical data are found attached.

I would have the complete works of the Hunters, every fragment available of John Hunter’s; everything of Haller—

[111] and that means a great deal—of Majendie, and a complete collection of the monographs of great modern physiologists, such as Claude Bernard. The original works of the great clinicians, of Boerhaave, Morgagni, Bichat, Laennec, Louis, Corvisart, Bright, and Addison should be on our shelves; and lastly the great works relating to the history of medicine and to medical bibliography should be collected. Books in the special historical and bibliographical department of the library could very well be added to this Warrington collection, in which way the university could express its appreciation and gratitude for the very generous gift received from Mr. Marburg.

And one word in conclusion—when the plans for the medical school were under discussion, I drew in outline what I should have liked to see on this plot of land. Very much idealized it would have taken many millions for its realization. Surrounding the entire square ran beautiful stone cloisters (ornamented with busts and statues of the great men of the profession), and uniting the four chief buildings which stood in the middle of the sides of the square. On the Monument Street front was a beautiful structure in stone devoted to the library and museum. This part of my plan could yet be realized. As the museum collections grow, and as year by year the books increase in number such a building will become a necessity, and in it these special libraries will find their appropriate home.